

October 25, 2011

Notes on Michael Dobbs, One Minute to Midnight

[I was wrong. After C-I, I believed the Kennedys had given up on the project of regime change in Cuba. Actually, it was their obsession, the “#1 national priority.” And Dobbs underrates their readiness for invasion. Mongoose was always premised on the necessity for US military intervention eventually, and on coordination with the military. I suspect it was primarily a platform for provocation, like 34A (also described pejoratively by Bundy and others as “pinpricks,” an excuse for not doing more; but really, I believe, intended to provide an excuse for doing more.). See the exercises, Northwoods, and the October directives for maximum readiness for invasion by Oct. 20. (!)

Both Castro and Che, and Khrushchev, had it exactly right; that the Americans would not permit a socialist regime in “their” hemisphere, and that next time it would mean invasion. This was not their paranoia, and it was not (as McNamara has “acknowledged” a reasonable though mistaken inference from our behavior. It was a totally correct understanding. Indeed, at enormous risk, Khrushchev did avert invasion, permanently, even though the US assurance was not finalized formally. (K could have done this at MUCH lower risk: especially if he had not wanted to “even the balance” and “give us a taste of our medicine” as well by putting in missiles. And he could have done the latter as well, if he had done it better, just right.

105 2/2 was offore Cuba readying for invasion (Operation ORTSAC having been cancelled after JFK’s speech: Vieques exercise for invasion of Cuba). 3/2 was deployed to Guantanamo. (K told William Knox on Wednesday, Oct. 24, that Guantanamo would “disappear the first day” of the invasion, p. 85 : an oblique reference to tactical nuclear weapons (the only one by K).

105: 18,000 casualties expected from first ten days of fighting, 4000 dead; USMC nearly half of casualties. “And that was without the participation of soviet combat troops or the use of nuclear weapons.” “The planners had given barely any thought to the possibility that the enemy might use tactixcal nuclear weapons to wipe out the beachheads.” “The seemingly routine task of drawing up a nuclear/chemical defense plan was given to a somewhat dim-witted major who ‘spent his time on things that were not the highest priority.’” (interview with a regimental planner)

113. K plans Thursday morning Oct. 25 to withdraw MRBMs—getting a deal to protect Cuba, “firm guarantees, a promise, that the Americans won’t attack Cuba.’ That’s not bad.” “In return for noninvasion guarantee, ‘we could take out the R-12s, and leave the other missiles there.’”

Thus, he would give up the second, or secondary goal, of improving the strategic balance (no mention of a Turkey deal) while assuring the primary goal of defending Cuba, using tac nuc missiles (and perhaps troops), as he could have done in the first place if that had been his only goal. Castro wanted this, as of Oct. 28. *But for deterrence, it would require revealing tac nuc missiles and warheads, and troops! In fact, I would guess he could have gotten this deal—and perhaps kept MRBMs as*

well, or made an open trade for Turkish missiles with those—if he had only revealed the presence of the *tac nucs*, warheads, and troops on Wednesday or Thursday or Friday, or even Saturday! That would have cancelled threats of invasion; and really, even of airstrike, with MRBMs fueled and with warheads (even without admitting delegation, or turning weapons over to Cubans: either of which was also possible, and considered before the JFK speech on Oct. 22). All the warheads were there by Tuesday night!